

# SEEKING THE DESPISED & HATED

## *A Meditation on Mark 2:13-14*

What is your attitude toward lost pagans<sup>o</sup> you know<sup>i</sup> those shameful, slimy, smelly sinners? This question is designed to help us examine our hearts, to see if it conforms to the heart of God.

There are basically four attitudes that a Christian can have toward the lost. The first is *hatred*. The Pharisees had this attitude, which is ironic since they were lost themselves (they just didn't see it). If we're not careful we can have this attitude as well. We can hate them because of their foul language, filthy habits, and forbidden lifestyles. For some strange reason we're surprised when sinners sin.

The second attitude is *indifference*. Perhaps, we used to be burdened by those who were perishing without Christ, but now it doesn't really bother us. Many years ago when I was working with a youth group, I asked one of the girls in the group how she felt about her brother who was defiant toward God and on the broad road leading to destruction. She replied casually, "Oh, you get used to it." This is a sign of a cold heart, and none of us is immune.

The third attitude we can call *welcoming*. This is a good attitude. When God providentially brings a lost sheep to your church you welcome them with open arms and pray that God will do a work in their life. When a neighbor or co-worker approaches you with a problem or spiritual question you praise God for the opportunity to be a minister for Him. This is a good attitude, but the best attitude is that of *seeking*. This person isn't content to wait for unbelievers to come to him, so he goes to them. This is the heart of God. This is the attitude of Jesus. This is what the incarnation is all about. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk. 19:10).

Let's pray that as individuals and as a church we will do more than welcome sinners. Let's petition God, to so move our hearts, that we weep over the lost, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. God forgive us for our dry eyes. Paul's desire for the Israelites should challenge us: "I am speaking the truth in Christ<sup>o</sup> I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit<sup>o</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh<sup>i</sup> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1).

In Mark 2:13-14, Jesus calls Levi to follow him. "[Jesus] went out again beside the sea" (vs. 13a). This is not a casual, leisurely stroll on the beach. Jesus is not on vacation, He is on a mission. "And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth" (vs. 14a). Levi is better known by his second name, Matthew<sup>o</sup> the writer of the first Gospel. Matthew is at his "office" collecting taxes. Keep in mind that people didn't like paying taxes 2000 years ago any more than we do today.

It's not surprising that Jesus sees a tax collector in Capernaum, since it was ideally situated to stop travelers arriving from the territory of Herod Philip to the east and north. Tax collectors like Levi worked for Herod Antipas and Rome, so they were considered traitors. "The Mishnah and Talmud (although written later) register scathing judgments of tax collectors, lumping them together with thieves and murderers. A Jew who collected taxes was disqualified as a judge or witness in court, expelled from the synagogue, and a cause of disgrace to his family. The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean" (James Edwards, *Mark*, p. 83). Needless to say, tax collectors were among the most despised and hated people in all of Israel.

It is to this unclean, greedy, treasonous, despised and hated sinner that Jesus says simply, but authoritatively, "Follow me." Observe carefully that Levi isn't looking for Jesus. He isn't what many like to call "a seeker." This encounter didn't take place at church, if you will. It didn't take place at an evangelistic crusade. Levi is at work, minding his own business, focused on how he can extract more money from vulnerable travelers and amass his fortune. Jesus didn't wait for Levi to come to him so he could welcome him with open arms; rather he personally sought him out on his own turf.

We read in Isaiah 65:1: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'" (NIV).

C.S. Lewis described his own conversion as “kicking and struggling into the kingdom.” He wasn’t looking for God, but God was looking for him. Don’t give up on family and friends who aren’t seeking God, because God may be seeking them through you.

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